



Here's the Dirt

A publication of the River Valley Garden Club

Deb Rooney & Jayne LaGrande Co-Presidents

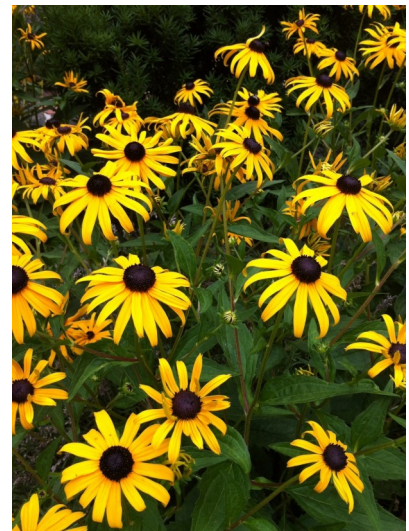
Nancy Compton, Editor

Rooting for You.....by Deb Rooney, Co-President

As I've been working in my garden between vacations and the wind and the rain, I've been thinking of ways to spruce up my empty garden spaces. I think we all have little spaces in our gardens that need a little extra help. Mine is the side of the house — it gets way too much sun and heat, but with raised flower beds already built, it's the perfect space for...something. I've been thinking about adding a cutting garden. So, I've done a little research, and here's what I've come up with...

First off, what is a cutting garden? It's a special type of garden area where you can grow flowers that are suitable for home bouquets and arrangements. By having a dedicated space for cutting flowers, you can enjoy the beauty of fresh blooms indoors without sacrificing the appearance of your landscape. Hmmm, sounds good to me. Here are some tips on how to plan and grow your own cutting garden:

- ◆ Choose a location that gets at least six hours of sun per day and has well-drained soil. You can also amend the soil with compost or organic fertilizer to improve its fertility and water retention.
- ◆ Select a variety of flowers that have long stems, attractive colors, and long-lasting blooms. You can mix and match annuals and perennials, and maybe throw in some flowering shrubs and herbs to create a diverse and abundant supply of cut flowers throughout the season. Some recommended options: zinnias, cosmos, sunflowers, dahlias, roses, and lavender.
- ◆ Plant your flowers in rows or blocks to make them easier to access, weed, and harvest. Think about adding plants that attract pollinators. Leave enough space between the plants to allow for air circulation and growth.
- ◆ Water your cutting garden regularly, especially during dry spells. Mulch the soil to conserve moisture and suppress weeds, deadhead the spent flowers to encourage more blooming and prevent self-seeding, fertilize your plants once or twice during the season with a balanced organic fertilizer to boost their health and keep everything blooming.



- ◆ Harvest flowers in the morning or evening when they are fully hydrated and have the most fragrance. As you cut the stems, place them immediately in a bucket of water.
- ◆ Arrange your flowers in a vase or container of your choice.
- ◆ How fun does that sound?? This may be this year's special project! I'll keep you posted.

Deb

Here We Go — Spring Tour Lineup

Sharon Barton and Laura McAllister, our very busy Tour Captains, have announced a lively lineup of things to do and places to be for the spring season. From camellias to roses, and tulips to cacti, it looks like we are embarking on a busy season of going and learning. Grab your calendar — here comes the schedule:

Day/Date	Destination	Additional Information
Weds., March 20	Hollendale for Spring Flowers	Meet at RMA parking lot at 10 a.m.
3rd week of April	Baldo Villegas' Rose Garden	Specific date to be announced
April date TBA	Crystal Hermitage Tulip Garden	Nevada City
Sunday, April 28	Folsom Garden Tour	Also open on Saturday, April 27
April or May	Pioneer School Garden	Somerset
May TBA	Poot's Cactus Nursery	Ripon — \$20/per person

Additional trips coming up — dates to be announced:

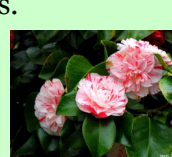
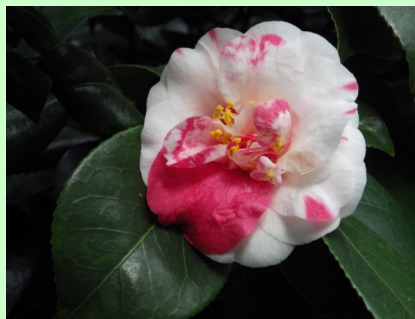
- ◆ Micke Grove Park in Lodi — beautiful rose garden
- ◆ Empire Mine Historic Park, Grass Valley (\$5.00 per person)

This year was the 100th anniversary of the Camellia Show in Sacramento, the first one being held in 1924. That show was held at David Lubin School and was hosted by the Sacramento Garden Club

If you are a Sacramento native, you most likely will remember when the Camellia Celebration included a parade, the crowning of a Camellia Queen, a golf tournament, sailboat races, and even a foot race. It was a total community involvement event.

Two of our members who also belong to the Sacramento Floral Design Guild took awards at the show — Catherine Reibe won best of show for her arrangement, and Berniece Jones took second place in her category. Congratulations to both of these floral designers!

Several of the field trips shown above do not yet have specific dates. This is because visiting these locations is weather-related. For example, would you prefer to visit a garden on a sunny day, or slosh around in the mud and rain? Your patience is appreciated while we await nice weather for our excursions.



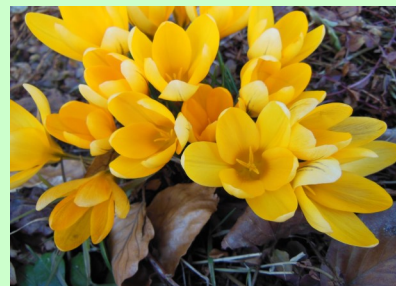
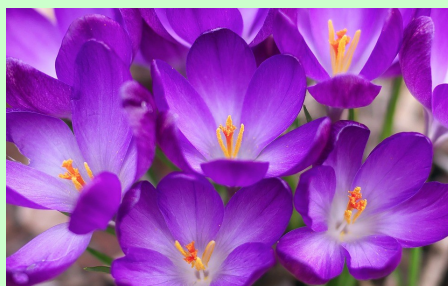
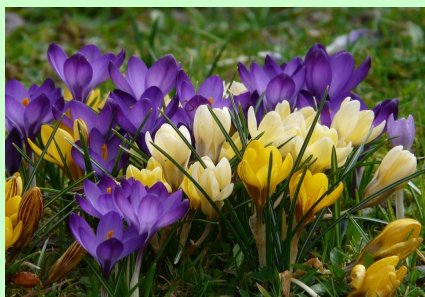
What Do You Really Know About Crocuses?



After the sun came out following the endless rain and gloom of early February, I put on a heavy jacket and took a walk outside to look reluctantly at my soggy garden.

I was surprised to see so many daffodils, and was really surprised to see how large my gazania plants had grown. But the flower that really made me smile was a little purple crocus sitting quietly by herself (or is it himself?) basking in the sun.

I have always loved crocuses. Something about them says “spring.” Especially when I lived in New York, I would spend the late winter/early spring days looking for the harbingers of spring in neighborhood parks — mainly forsythia, pussywillow, and crocus. I don’t see forsythia or pussywillow around here, but I do see crocuses — many of them in my own garden. There is something about a pop of color after endless gloomy days that just makes my heart sing. But other than their happy colors and welcome-to-spring appearances, I never knew or thought much about crocuses, so imagine my surprise when I learned that they are a source of saffron! Yes — that spice that is so expensive that I never buy it.



The saffron is obtained from the dried stigma of *Crocus sativas*, which is actually an autumn-blooming crocus.

Here’s some history I don’t recall learning in school — in 300 B.C. some Greek writers knew and wrote about the crocus, because they were apparently growing all over Greece and Turkey where celebrated Greek and Turkish chefs were lavishly adding it to what today is known as Mediterranean cuisine. Sounds tasty!

Crocuses are not only cheerful and colorful, but their enticing aroma apparently attracts bees and native pollinators, which we always try to bring to our gardens. Spring-blooming crocuses provide one of the first pollen sources of the year at a time when not much food is available for bees to gather. As a bonus, crocuses seem to be ignored by deer, squirrels, and bunnies.

Crocuses are also said to have a spiritual meaning. They signify a positive outlook on life in anticipation of better things to come. Their delicate and cheerful nature is often linked to youthfulness and joy. It seems that hanging out with crocuses is so much better than trying botox.

Sowing Seeds...

Timely Tips from Green Acres

Spring is the time of reawakening...for the birds, for our spirits., and certainly for our gardens. It's also the time of year when we head to our favorite garden center to see what's blooming, to check out the latest garden implements, and maybe even to peruse the seed selection. That's what I did the last time I was at Green Acres. Not only did I find some wonderful seed packets, but I pulled one of their informational flyers from the rack and found detailed info on what to do when growing veggies and flowers from seed. The following is from this flyer:

- ◆ Annual and perennial flowers and vegetables should be sown indoors four to eight weeks before transplanting outdoors.
- ◆ Use a seed starting mix or peat plug.
- ◆ Spread seeds thinly over the surface of the seed starting mix using three to five seeds per cell/pot. Cover seeds with the mix at the depth recommended on the seed package. Keep in mind that too much seed starting mix can prevent seeds from germinating.
- ◆ Moisten the mix and cover with a seed dome to prevent seeds from drying out. Move newly planted seeds to a warm area or heating mat for faster germination.
- ◆ Monitor regularly, ensuring that seed starter mix is kept moist.
- ◆ Once seeds germinate, showing their first pair of leaves, move to a sunny window or under fluorescent lights. Young plants need 12-14 hours of light per day (sunlight and/or fluorescent light). Rotate every couple of days to prevent seedlings from bending to reach the light.
- ◆ Snip off the weaker of the seedlings with scissors. Eventually you will have one strong plant per pot.
- ◆ When the roots grow through the bottom of the pot, it's time to transplant. Consult your seed package for further instructions specific to your seed.



Seed Starting Workshop



Donna Hansen mixing planting soil at the seed-starting workshop

On Sunday, March 3, nine RVGC gardeners gathered in Margaret Watkins-Hopkins' garage to get a head start on planting seeds for the club's plant sale in May. Gardeners brought a wide variety of seeds they had been collecting which ranged from flowers such as zinnias, forget-me-nots, marigolds and sunflowers to vegetables like tomatoes, squash, and beans.

And then there was a package of amaranth — a grain that was unfamiliar to most. Margaret gave some history on this grain that involved the Aztec civilization. Amaranth was not just a food source for the Aztec, but it played a major part in their worship. They built statues of their deity using amaranth and blood. These statues were worshipped, broken, and then distributed for eating.

This grain, high in protein and rich in essential minerals was eventually banned by the conquistadores because of its use in human sacrifice. Some sources mention that the Aztec then began making their amaranth-and-blood statues surreptitiously, but unfortunately there are no Aztecs today to confirm this.



Vivian Baier showing her planted seed pots

Workshop attendees each took home several pots to tend until they start to sprout. They will find their way to sunny windows or under fluorescent lighting, as they will need at least 12 hours of light each day to encourage growth. It is suggested that once the little sprouts peek their heads up out from under the seed starter mix, that they are rotated every couple of days so their stems don't bend in one direction.



Peat pots ready to be planted with seeds



Donna Hansen, Rosann Stevenson, (2nd row) Vivian Baier, Jayne LeGrande, Margaret Watson-Hopkins, (3rd row) Sharon Barton, Janice Pennington



Northwestern Flower & Garden Festival Doesn't Disappoint



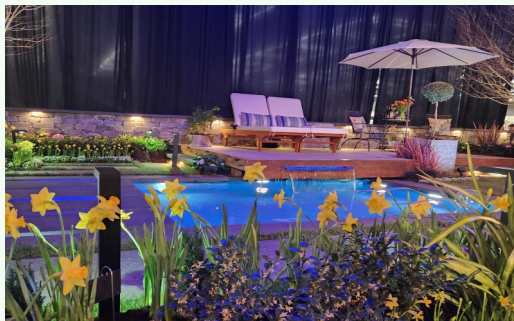
Woodland demonstration garden with stunning waterfall

Several club members traveled to Seattle in mid-February to attend the Northwest Flower and Garden Festival held at the Seattle Convention Center.

This three-day convention offered over 90 seminars and demonstrations on a huge variety of garden-related topics such as demonstrations of tools & pruning, creating garden art, tips for successful gardening and planting, floral arranging — in short, something for everyone.

Also offered was a workshop on making a terrarium, which was not only fun and instructive, but created a serious challenge related to getting these terrariums home on an airplane without demolishing them.

One of the major highlights of the show was the fabulous garden displays which were stunning works of art, all of which were constructed in 72 hours on the showroom floor. Altogether, these garden displays contained 30,000 plants and blooming flowers with exceptional color and plant variety.



Backyard retreat demonstration garden

The following day, the group visited the Chihuly Museum and Gardens that showcase the studio glass art of Dale Chihuly who has shown his glass artwork in botanical gardens all over the world. The unique plant collection in the Seattle garden was specifically chosen to complement Chihuly's work and the striking colors and forms of the trees, plants, and flowers which create a rich backdrop for the glass art. Enjoy these photos taken at the gardens.



Northwest Flower & Garden Festival attendees (left. to right) Phyllis Holmes, Berniece Jones, Laura McAllister, Nancy Compton, Maria Lopez

